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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000137

SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, AF/PDPA, DRL, INR/AA
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/26
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: YAR'ADUA'S REMAINING SUPPORT ERODES FURTHER

REF: ABUJA 0129 AND PREVIOUS

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CLASSIFIED BY: James P. McAnulty, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy
Abuja, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Demands for President Yar'Adua to step aside continued to mount from nearly all sections. Information and Communications Minister Dora Akunyili distributed a memorandum at the February 3 Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting demanding that Yar'Adua submit a hand-over letter to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan. Senate and House contacts indicated that they would consider initiating impeachment proceedings if Yar'Adua fails to transmit this letter soon. Two-time former Presidential Candidate General Muhammadu Buhari resigned from the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). END SUMMARY.

FEC VENEER OF UNITY CRACKS

12. (C) Minister Akunyili confirmed to Ambassador February 4 that she had circulated a memorandum at the February 3 FEC meeting that called upon President Yar'Adua to hand over power to Vice President Jonathan as Acting President. Confirming the accuracy of press reports, she told the Ambassador that she was glad that she had stood up to the situation. Akunyili promised to forward a copy of her memorandum, which Embassy has not yet received.

13. (C) According to press reports, the Information Minister circulated the document because she no longer wanted to participate in a "charade." She argued that the President's prolonged absence had stalled government business and led to unconstitutional

actions. She noted as examples that several Permanent Secretaries awaited swearing-in, the previous Supreme Court Justice swore in his successor, the Vice President ordered deployment of troops to Jos, and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) opted out of the amnesty program. After receiving shouts of protest from other Cabinet Ministers, she withdrew her memorandum, and Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Mahmud Yayale Ahmed personally collected copies of the document from Cabinet members, warning them not to leak it to the media.

14. (C) Presidential Advisor Sani Musa told PolCouns February 4 that normally a Minister would provide a copy of a document to the SGF before the FEC meeting to circulate among Ministers in advance, something that Akunyili had not done. He remarked that Nigerians fully recognized that Yar'Adua was in "terrible shape." He described the Yar'Adua Presidency as finished. Musa noted as well that he understood that Yar'Adua had signed an undated hand-over letter before leaving Nigeria, leaving instructions to transmit the letter if he had not returned within two weeks. He remarked that whoever had blocked transmittal of the letter had committed a criminal offense.

PATIENCE OF HOUSE MEMBERS RUNNING LOW

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15. (C) House Army Committee Deputy Chairperson Matthew Omegara, a Representative for the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) from Imo State, told PolCouns and PolOffs February 3 that he and his House colleagues have begun to lose patience over the failure of Yar'Adua to transmit a letter to the legislature designating Vice President Jonathan as Acting President. He recounted how House Speaker Dimeji Bankole had delayed a vote on a resolution demanding the hand-over letter until pro-Yar'Adua "lobbyists" changed the minds of enough Representatives who had earlier signed a petition supporting the resolution. While not saying directly, he implied that money changed hands.

16. (C) Speaker Bankole, Omegara claimed, also derailed a point of order raised by a Representative regarding a proposed visit to Saudi Arabia by a six-member House delegation to verify the President's condition. He asked the head of the delegation and clerk whether the six members' passports had received visas from the Saudi Embassy, to which they replied affirmatively. Omegara predicted that such maneuvers, while expedient in the short term, would back-fire on the Speaker, whom he described as "digging his own grave" politically. He said the delegation would have to depart for Saudi Arabia soon. If they actually lacked visas, the House members would call Bankole to account. If, on the other hand, they traveled to Saudi Arabia and failed to see the President, Omegara predicted that support would build for possible impeachment proceedings against Yar'Adua.

JUDGE'S RULING DOES NOTHING TO RESOLVE CRISIS

17. (C) Omegara remarked that the recent ruling by a Federal High Court Judge that Vice President Jonathan already had authority to handle presidential duties, but not as Acting President until he received a hand-over letter from the incumbent, did nothing to

resolve the constitutional impasse. Since the Vice President lacked the power to perform as Commander-in-Chief, he said, the military obeyed the Vice President's orders to deploy troops to Jos to quell communal violence strictly because they wanted to. He averred that the current impasse over presidential power could not continue much longer.

MILITARY REMAINS IN BARRACKS

¶18. (C) Omegara, who noted that he frequently visited military installations to monitor developments, described the senior military leadership as fully supportive of civilian rule. He stated that military leaders had gained exposure to democratic practices during training and visits abroad and had also witnessed first-hand, during peace-keeping missions, what has happened to other countries when governance and military rule go awry.

SENATORS INSIST ON RESOLUTION

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¶19. (C) Senate President David Mark publicly reiterated support February 2 for the resolution unanimously approved by colleagues demanding a letter of "medical vacation" from the President, according to press reports. He sidestepped the issue, however, of whether the Senate would seek Yar'Adua's impeachment, if he failed to transmit the letter. Nonetheless, Senate Navy Committee Chairperson Bode Olajumoke confided privately to PolMil Assistant February 1 that Senators would go for impeachment, if the President did not transmit the letter soon. He insisted that Senators blamed a circle of eight to ten presidential associates for preventing the hand-over.

NEWS ON OPPOSITION FRONT

¶10. (C) On the opposition front, two-time former presidential candidate Buhari resigned from the ANPP, according to his lawyer and the media. Buhari said he had some "fundamental and irreconcilable differences" with current ANPP leaders. He reportedly planned to join the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), which the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had recently registered as a new political party. (COMMENT: Buhari had earlier expressed interest in supporting the formation of an opposition "mega" party. Whether he has changed his mind about the "mega" party remains unclear. END COMMENT.)
MCCULLOUGH